

FRETWELL HALL;

A MORAL

AND

INSTRUCTIVE STORY.

Embellished with Engravings on Wood.



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FRETWELL HALL.

LETITIA FRETWELL was the daughter of a gentleman of considerable fortune, residing in Berkshire. With a good-humoured indolence of disposition, he lived pleasantly among his neighbours, went to church regularly, avoided quarrels of every sort, left the management of his tenants entirely to his steward, nor did he ever interfere with his wife's domestic arrangements.

Having been married fifteen years without offspring, the birth of Letitia was hailed with every demonstration of joy. The bells were rung, and a feast was given on the day of the christening, to his tenantry.



The gossips, as usual on such occasions, sat in full council on the features of the infant, and at-

though various in their prognostics, yet were all highly flattering. One indeed, more learned than the rest, ventured to predict, that from the hour in which the child was born, under the then reigning planet, she would some how be allied to Royalty. Nurse was sure she would be a perfect beauty, for she was now mama in miniature.

All, however, were not of this opinion, for Jenny the cook was indiscreet enough to tell her fellow servants, that if ever she saw a vixen countenance, the baby above stairs had one; which said opinion, coming to the ears of her mistress, caused her instant dismissal.

Farmer Thresher also, (who lived in a small tenement hard by,) returning home on the evening of the christening, much later than usual, being asked by his wife what had kept him; without answering her questions, angrily exclaimed, "All this feasting and ringing for a poor little puny thing! who, if she lives, will be only a mere fine lady like her mother, neither sick nor well all her life, fit only to be dressed up, and play cards on Sundays."

"Nay, James," said his wife, "neither Squire Fretwell, nor his lady, ever play cards on Sundays." "I should like to know," said her husband, "what is the difference between playing cards, and singing songs; and having large musical parties on Sunday evenings." "It's of no use for us," observed his wife, "to rail against what we cannot mend: the Fretwells are thought to be very worthy people by every body."

"Now that's the very thing which aggravates me," exclaimed the farmer, "that they should be cried up by every body for such worthy people—There's poor Will Coulter," continued he, "who broke his leg last week, (though as honest and industrious a man as ever lived, and has worked for Squire Fretwell these ten years;) when they paid him, last Saturday, Rigid, the steward, stopped his pay from the day on which the accident hap-

pened. You know their poverty and large family; and the doctor tells him he must not stand on it for this month yet; and how, in that case, are they to live?"—"Depend upon it, James," interrupted his wife, "this is Rigid's doing; his master knows nothing about it."

"I thought so too," replied her husband, "so I determined to speak to the Squire himself for the poor fellow. Accordingly, I watched for him as I returned from work this evening. As soon as he saw me, he asked very kindly how I did. I thanked him, said I was well, and only wished my poor neighbour Will Coulter was as——" "Ah!" said he, (interrupting me,) "that was a sad accident." "Sad, indeed, Sir," said I, "for he will not be able to work for this month; and how are they to live? for Mr. Rigid has stopped"—— "What!" said he quickly, "has not Rigid paid him his due?" "Yes, Sir, he has paid him his due; but what is to become of his family?"——



Without hearing another word, he turned on his heel and left me, saying, "Let him speak to Rigid; he has the management of all my affairs."

"La ! James !" said his wife, "how will they live till he is able to work ?" "Why," said her husband, "I could not go to poor Coulter, and tell them they must starve ; for I knew it was of no use speaking to Rigid : so, instead of coming home at my usual time, I have been working three hours for them, and will give them two hours to-morrow morning, before I go to my own work. I don't mind that a rush ; I am none the worse for it. Neighbour Collins will also give a helping hand : so, between us, I hope we shall be able to manage for him till he can help himself. But then to hear these people cried up for their virtues, it makes one angry ; and perhaps it is wrong ; for, as far as I see, they have no great good of their riches ; but that too may be their own fault."

"Ah ! but God will bless you, my dear James, for your exertions," said his wife, her eyes swimming in tears, "I would not have Squire Fretwell's hard heart, for all the money he is worth : but still I think Mrs. Fretwell is not in fault. I know she is reckoned whimsical, always meeting with something extraordinary, which she exaggerates in telling,—a habit, no doubt, she has got by reading romantic books when a girl ;—but there is no great harm in that, you know. Now she is a mother," continued she, (looking at the cradle in which lay a fine girl of a twelvemonth old,) "she will feel for poor little helpless children. I will go to her to-morrow morning, and speak for the poor Coulters." Her husband shook his head : "Aye, you may go, Susan, but I doubt"—"I can but try, however," said she.

And now, rested in body, and more composed in mind, Farmer Thresher sat down to supper ; and on the following morning, his wife did not fail to wait on the Squire's lady ; who, having just returned from an airing in her carriage, expressed some surprise, when Susan Thresher sent up her duty, and begged to speak to her.

"What can she possibly want with me?" said the lady. "I believe, Ma'am, said the servant, "she wishes to speak to you about the family of the Coulters." "The Coulters!" cried Mrs. Fretwell, in astonishment, "what in heaven have I to do with the Coulters? I never spoke to one of them in my life." "The poor man, Madam, broke his leg last week." "Well!" answered the lady sharply, "and could I help that?" "No, Madam, but his wages are stopped, and he has a large family of children." "Children!" drawled the lady, "what are children? A little bread and a little milk keeps them"—looking at her own infant, then about five weeks old, whom the nurse was feeding. "You may tell Mrs. Thresher," resumed she, "that I never interfere in Mr. Fretwell's affairs: it is his business, not mine." And so saying, the lady dismissed the applicant without seeing her.

Being an only child, the infant Letitia soon became the idol of her mother, the plaything of her father, and, as she grew up, the torment of all their acquaintance; the consequence of unbounded indulgence. For, from the moment Mrs. Fretwell became a mother, a worrying anxiety took place in her disposition; she fancied her child could only be safe in her presence. Frequently would she deprive herself of sleep, by listening to hear if it cried; and if perchance such a thing did happen, the whole house was instantly in motion.

Mr. Fretwell saw this entire change in his domestic comfort, with great equanimity; as exertion would have cost him more trouble than the evil, such as it was.

The fourth birth day of Letitia arrived, and a large party of friends were invited to celebrate it, who, on their arrival at the appointed time, were received by the lady of the mansion with a very dismal countenance. The visitors were eager in their inquiries as to the cause.

"Oh! dear Lady Sparkle!" exclaimed Mrs.

Fretwell,—“my dear Miss Maynard! I wonder I am alive! and so will you, when I tell you what a sad accident has happened.” The company were shocked, and somewhat disappointed, as they had come with the expectation of passing a pleasant evening.

“You know how apt I am to be low-spirited,” Mrs. Fretwell began,—“well, all day yesterday I had such a depression, I knew something would happen, and went to bed very wretched; and had just dropped asleep, when I was awakened by a heavy fall of something. Screaming, I jumped up and ran into the nursery. Oh! my dear friends, guess my feelings, when I saw my child lying breathless!”——“What! dead?” exclaimed the company.—Stretching her neck, winking her eyes, and drawing a long breath, (a trick Mrs. Fretwell always resorted to, when conscious she had gone beyond the reality,) “Stunned, I should have said,” resumed she. “Send for a doctor, I had just strength to say, and then fell into hysterics.”

“Where was Mr. Fretwell?” asked Miss Maynard. “What did the doctor say?” inquired another of the guests. “Oh! the doctor wanted to persuade me,” replied Mrs. Fretwell, “that she was in a profound sleep, and had never waked with falling out of bed; and in short, he seemed out of humour at having been disturbed; as if doctors were not to attend their patients by night as well as by day.”

“In cases of emergency only, Madam,” said an old gentleman, who felt indignant at Mrs. Fretwell’s folly. “But where was Mr. Fretwell?” again inquired Miss Maynard. “Ah! where indeed?” said the lady, “you may well ask that question: Mr. Fretwell was in bed, my dear Miss Maynard, fast asleep.” The entrance of her husband at this moment, with a gentleman for whom the dinner had been kept back some little time, put a stop to all further recital. The ladies had only time to ask how the child then was, and were

answered by Mrs. Fretwell, "As well as could be expected," before they were all seated at table.

The first course had been removed, and the second put on, when Mr. Fretwell observed that the partridges were over-roasted. "If they are," said Mr. Clark, "the fault is mine, in making the dinner wait; but I trust, when the company knows the cause of my delay, it will be my apology. A most curious adventure beset me, this morning. I was suddenly awakened about six o'clock, with a violent knocking at the street-door"——.

The attention of the company was fixed upon the narrator, with intense curiosity; all excepting Mrs. Fretwell, whose thoughts were, as usual, running upon her child. "Oh! Mr. Clark," said she, at this critical juncture, "you have not heard of poor Letty's accident last night?" "I have not, indeed," replied the gentleman, in an alarmed tone; "nothing serious, I hope?" "Pooh, pooh!" said Mr. Fretwell, "the child fell out of bed, that's all." The company wished Letty had never been born, though they had met to celebrate her birthday. Mr. Fretwell, too, anxious to hear his friend's adventure, discovered an impatience rather unusual for him, at this "thrice-told tale:" but in vain, for his wife began to detail the accident (as she persisted in calling it) in all its forms,—the child's danger, her own terrors, the doctor's impertinence: in short, the dismal relation of what was, or what might have been, lasted till the cloth was removed, and the dessert on the table.

"Now, Sir," said Mr. Fretwell to Mr. Clark, "your adventure, if you please." Again the guests were all attention,—but scarcely had the gentleman resumed, when in ran Letitia. "Oh, my darling!" cried the enraptured mother, "come and ask the ladies and gentlemen how they do. Papa! Mr. Fretwell," exclaimed the impatient lady, (observing her husband and guests listening to Mr. Clark,) "I say, Mr. Fretwell, drink to your

daughter's health ; remember, this is her day"—a hint to the company as well as her husband.

Glasses were filled, and the usual compliments went round ; and now, all conversation stopped, and her child the sole object of attention, Mrs. Fretwell felt completely gratified.

Letitia at first remained quietly standing by her mother. The visitants, after admiring her growth, and vainly endeavouring to make her speak, sat for a few minutes in stupid silence, as well as under a disagreeable restraint ; each not liking to speak to her neighbour, as they had been called to order.

On the ladies retiring to the drawing-room, Letty, who was by this time thoroughly awake, began to entertain the company with running backwards and forwards, as fast and as loud as she could ; then round and round the room, till, turning giddy, down she fell, and a fit of crying for half an hour succeeded.

Recovered from this trouble, the spoiled child was next attracted by the glitter of Lady Sparkle's diamond brooch, who, poor woman, little foreseeing the persecutions that awaited her that day, had adorned herself with some of her best jewels.

Accustomed to have every thing given to her, the moment she expressed a wish for it, Letitia ran and seized the brooch ; but finding it fastened, began to pull and scream at the same time. In order to divert her from the object, Lady Sparkle took her on her knee, and in an under tone, told her that if she would be a good child, and sit still——When she was suddenly cut short, by feeling the little fingers of the urchin tightly grasped round her pearl necklace ; and in endeavouring to disengage them, the string broke, and they were scattered upon the carpet.

Struggling between anger and complaisance, the lady pushed the mischievous child off her lap, who, nothing daunted at what she had done, stood as if enjoying the confusion she had made ; for



several of the company were assisting the servant who had been called in to pick up the pearls.

Miss Maynard (one of the visitors) was a lady of great decorum, kept an eminent boarding-school in the neighbourhood, and reigned supreme in her establishment. Feeling justly indignant at this last mischievous trick, she was impelled to give Letitia a slight reprimand. Catching hold of her as she was running past, and stooping down, she began—when the little vixen, making a snatch at her curls, Miss Maynard, with a sudden exclamation of “Oh heaven!” had just time to save her well-arranged head-dress from lying on the floor, as the tea equipage was brought in, and the gentlemen followed it.

Adieu now to all pleasure or comfort: not a lady in the room but feared a similar attack.

Tea and coffee were served; and a game of romps between Letitia and her father, which lasted the remainder of the time, concluded the evening's entertainment; from which the guests de-

parted, feeling the utmost disgust for the child, and contempt for the parents.

As Letitia grew older, the playfulness of infancy passed away, and with it much of the interest she held in her father's affection.

Taught to recite scraps of poetry before she learnt to read; early expert at cards, dancing a minuet, and playing off little tunes on the piano, she appeared to her mother a prodigy. Whatever progress Letitia made through the masters' assiduity, was never attributed to their skill by Mrs. Fretwell, but always to the superior capacity of her daughter: by the same rule, her stupidity was considered as their negligence.

All the smart answers and wonderful speeches of Letitia were carefully treasured up by her mother, and told to every one in the presence of her daughter, who would sit wondering at her own cleverness and superiority.

The father, equally unreflecting as the mother, was highly diverted with her airs of self-importance, and used jestingly to call her the little Duchess; an appellation which, though given in derision, was highly grateful to Letitia, as a foolish prediction at her birth had been often repeated to her. But while the embellishments of her daughter took up all Mrs. Fretwell's attention, her temper, *that* which has so great an influence on the happiness, and which so frequently decides the great as well as the smaller concerns of life; that, alas! had been totally neglected; and great were the evils which the want of this virtue brought upon Letitia.

The passions of Letitia being under no control, increased daily; she became impatient of contradiction; even the simple act of dressing her, was an operation to be dreaded. Her clothes were tied too tight or too loose; the comb hurt her head; and all this often succeeded by long fits of crying. The mother applied to the doctor to cure her temper; he sent regularly bread pills, and prescribed walking out frequently.

It was one of this spoilt child's caprices never to let the servant follow her but at a distance ; an order which Betty willingly complied with, as it gave her frequent opportunities of joining her acquaintance, and entertaining them with her young mistress's vagaries.

It happened that one evening, as Letitia was walking in a hay-field, not far from her residence, her servant, as usual, at some distance behind her, gossiping, a group of young girls were seated in a ring near the path-way ; and to enjoy their sport with more freedom, had thrown their bonnets on one side, which Letitia no sooner perceived, than she haughtily kicked one of them before her.



"Leave my bonnet alone," said the owner. Letitia trampled it under her feet. Up sprung two of the party, and immediately attacked the aggressor ; who, it must be confessed, made a most valiant resistance : they cuffed and kicked each other ; but as her fine muslin dress was their chief object, that was quickly in tatters ; then catching

up their bonnets, they ran off as fast as their feet could carry them.

Now this scuffle had taken place so quickly, fear of future punishment having kept one party silent, and rage the other, that not more than two or three minutes elapsed during the whole of it.

Nor was it till the girls had quitted the meadow, that the servant saw the plight of her young mistress. Uttering a piercing scream, she hastily inquired who had made her in that condition. "Those lasses running across the field," answered a boy who had seen the affray. Away ran Betty after them, leaving her young mistress returning homewards in sullen dignity, her rags fluttering in the gale, and accompanied by a crowd of idle children to her own door, where she was let in by the wondering servant.

She related her misadventure to her parents, and of course told the story her own way. Her father seemed inclined to be diverted with her appearance; not so her mother, who, conscious of her daughter's violence, felt shocked, and, for the first time in her life, ashamed of Letitia's behavior.

The servant came home some time after, and beginning to apologize, was told to be silent, and not say a word more of the matter. So Betty "came off," to use her own expression, "with dying colours."

Fully aware the doctor's pills had no effect on her daughter's temper, Mrs. Fretwell turned in her mind various expedients to mend it, and at last hit on the following.

"Dear me," said she one day to her husband, "I am thinking that if Letitia had a good-humored companion, one of her own age I mean."—"True," answered Mr. Fretwell, "somebody who would serve her to quarrel with, and save you and all of us at times." "No," said his wife, angrily, "she wants some one to divert, and keep up her spirits." "Her spirits," repeated he, bursting in to a loud laugh, "I am sure she did not lack spir-

it in the fields the other day." "That, Sir," said the lady, with dignity, "is no laughing matter to me; I have been ashamed to appear out of doors since."

Quickly brought to order by his wife's looks, Mr. Fretwell began to repair his error by telling over the names of several young girls in the neighbourhood, but every one was objected to. "There's Susan Thresher," said Mrs. Fretwell. "Aye, indeed, she is every thing one could wish," replied her husband; "but I fear her parents will not part with her; besides, her father has become of so much consequence in the parish, he is now a leading man. I cannot hire a labourer or strike a bargain with any one, but, 'if my honour won't be offended, he will just speak to Farmer Thresher,' before the business can be concluded. And my tenant, Wingold, the lawyer, has given notice to quit; he tells me he has nothing to do, for Farmer Thresher gives his advice gratis."

"So much the better," said his wife, "all that favours my plan; for, when they understand that their daughter is to have the benefit of the masters, with Letitia, their rising in the world will make them the more readily consent to her living with us."

Mr. Fretwell had said, most truly, that Farmer Thresher, though comparatively poor, was more looked up to in his neighbourhood than any man in the town of Abingdon: his noble conduct to poor Coulter, and the assistance he had given him, drew the attention of all: comparisons were made: the parish, too, was sensible that through his exertions the poor fellow's family were prevented from becoming burthensome to it. For Farmer Thresher was one of that valuable class of men in society, who are always ready to employ their best exertions to assist their fellow creatures.

The resource of his neighbours on all occasions; referred to in every emergency, and never in

vain ; softening the anger of some, persuading others to return to their duty ; in short, by doing all the good in his power, and doing it in a quiet, unobtrusive way ; he was loved and venerated by all who knew him. From his example the poor learned to be content in their station, or, by industry and exertion, to rise above it. The opulent felt it their interest to be upon terms with him, and in many instances cultivated his acquaintance. How great was the satisfaction resulting from this conduct ! In maintaining a character for integrity, benevolence, and industry, Farmer Thresher knew one of the sweetest and most satisfying delights that the mind of man is capable of. The domestic happiness he also enjoyed, in the good sense and cheerful activity of his wife, a clean and quiet fire-side, regular meals, a house managed with order and economy ; always ready for the reception of a friend, or the accommodation of a stranger : every thing was done with that method that, in well regulated minds, is sure to produce harmony and peace.

Busied in the various occupations of domestic life, Mrs. Thresher was necessitated to leave the little Susan to find her own diversions, which, in a disposition naturally good, became the means of resources in her own mind at a more advanced period of life ; managing the restraints of her early years with so much reason and love, that Susan seemed to know nothing but liberty.

An admonition from her parents always met with cheerful submission, and was never debated.

In the practice of the needle, she was early expert, nor was her school education neglected ; but example was the foundation of her knowledge ; they educated her with such discretion, tenderness, and piety, as rendered her a happy, as well as a useful, member of society.

Her parents saw with pleasure their cares repaid, and returned daily thanks to Heaven, whose blessing seemed to attend them.

How different the Fretwells ! they had abundance, but did not enjoy it. "My interest, my convenience, my comforts," were ever in their thoughts ; the benevolent pleasure of benefiting others, they were utter strangers to.

Hating their own company, they sought refuge from themselves,—Mrs. Fretwell in frivolous society, and her husband in the pleasures of the bottle. But this did not always drown reflection ; their consciences would frequently accuse and condemn them for living thus wholly for themselves.

Their child also, who might have been a blessing to them, from their utter neglect of those principles which should have formed and regulated her mind, eventually proved their greatest punishment.

No sooner had Mrs. Fretwell thought of Susan for a companion to her daughter, than a polite letter was sent to the Threshers, followed quickly by the lady herself, who, entering abruptly on the business, detailed the many advantages which Susan would receive ; she would be attended by the best masters, treated as her own daughter ; and concluded by saying, she would make a lady of her. All this was uttered with so much volubility, that the farmer and his wife had only to listen in silence till the current had run itself out.

They were much surprised, but not dazzled by the offer : availing themselves of the pause, they acknowledged their sense of the kindness intended towards their daughter ; but firmly, though civilly, declined it.

They assured her, they had no wish that their child should become a lady : an active and useful life was what they intended for her. In saying this, Farmer Thresher thought he had settled the matter. But Mrs. Fretwell was not to be so repulsed : what had at first only passed through her mind, as a wish, was by opposition increased to a passionate desire.

From endeavouring to persuade, she descended to entreaties, pointed out the good that might be effected, by her coming to them, and added, that Letitia had an affection for Susan. "Why, my dear lady," said the honest farmer, "how can that be, when they have never spoken to each other?"

Mrs. Fretwell said it was so, nevertheless, and moreover added, that she dared not take home a denial; assuring them, that if they would let their daughter come, it would be one of the best actions of their lives; for it would make a whole family happy.

Had Mrs. Fretwell possessed either feeling or penetration, she would never have carried her point; as she must have seen the strong repugnance these worthy people felt to part with their child.

But she had attacked them in a vulnerable part; that of being able to do good. After some hesitation, and stipulating that Susan should pass the Sunday at home, they gave their consent.

The lady having now gained her point, overwhelmed them with civilities, returned home in high spirits; and the following week, Susan Thresher was constituted an inmate at Fretwell Hall.

The mild manners and cheerful disposition of Susan, joined to the novelty of having a young companion, had, for a considerable time, a wonderful effect on Letitia: pride came to her aid, and she felt ashamed to expose herself before her new acquaintance.

Mrs. Fretwell congratulated herself daily on the success of her plan, which had answered even more than she could have expected.

How little did farmer Thresher and his wife think, when they parted with their child, she would not again reside under their roof! 'Tis true, Mrs. Fretwell had not stipulated for any limited time; but the parents of Susan had, and greatly

were they disappointed, when at the end of eight years, there was no more likelihood of their having their daughter home, than there had been at the end of one.

Yes! eight years had passed, since Susan Thresher went to live at Fretwell Hall; and many were the changes which had taken place in that space of time.

The gout had made great inroads on the constitution of Mr. Fretwell; he was grown morose and peevish, become an invalid, neglected in his family, and never having cultivated his mind, by reading or study, he had full leisure to think how little good he had done in the world.

From leading an indolent and luxurious life, Mrs. Fretwell had become prematurely infirm, and ailing; she could no longer support the fatigue of company; yet, such was the force of habit, the same routine of visiting and parties continued.

Mischievous in infancy, turbulent in childhood, Letitia had grown up a perverse and fretful woman. A rainy day, or a disappointment by her mantua-maker, would make her wish herself dead, or that she had never been born; and twenty other such idle exclamations. She hated her home, she said, for it was like an hospital filled with sick people.

To these unkind speeches her mother would calmly reply, "I think, Letty, you might have a little patience with your home, as you are so soon likely to leave it." For it was much talked of, that Letitia was to be united to the Rev. Mr. Vilers, the Vicar of Abingdon, a gentleman about thirty years of age, pleasing in his person, and of the most amiable disposition; and the youngest son of a noble but numerous family. This gentleman was remarkably assiduous in his visits at Fretwell Hall, frequently accompanying Letitia on the German flute, when she sang or played, and escorting her and Susan to places of amuse-

ment ; in short, he seemed to identify himself with the family. He was absent at present on account of the death of his father, whose title, that of Lord Willoughby, went to his eldest son.

It may seem strange that Mrs. Fretwell should speak of her daughter's separation from her with so much indifference ; that daughter too, for whose sake alone she seemed to live : the fact was, that Letitia, from being an object of love, had become an object of fear ; and bitter were the reflections that frequently crossed the mind of this wretched mother, when she compared her own stern and unnatural child, with the mild and affectionate Susan ; who, (like the ministering angel of mercy,) was always employed in some act of kindness, going from one sick room to another, collecting the little news of the day, for the suffering Mr. Fretwell ; who, (from being so much alone,) would listen to her with greedy attention ; and soothing the complaints of his wife, with all those little acts of kindness so grateful to invalids.

But the importance of Susan, was also felt in another department : to keep Letitia in good humour, they had frequent company ; and, as Mrs. Fretwell could not at most sit above half an hour in the drawing-room ; while Letitia, either from indolence or whim, would always appear as guest at her father's table, the whole ceremony of receiving and entertaining the company, devolved upon Susan ; who, prepared by her mother in her earlier years for all the useful purposes of domestic life, and by the accomplishments she acquired at Fretwell Hall, was equally fitted to move in an elevated sphere, or fulfil the duties of an humbler one.

Mrs. Fretwell, fully aware of the treasure she possessed, daily repeated, she would never part with Susan ; the thoughts of depriving the parents of this much-loved child never entered the mind of this selfish woman.

The death of Lord Willoughby, and Mr. Vil-

lers' elder brother succeeding to the title, were subjects much talked of in the town of Abingdon ; some arguing the possible promotion of their pastor, and others fearing any change, by which they might lose him.

But what were the sensations of Miss Povey, the lady, who, at the birth of Letitia had predicted that she would somehow be allied to royalty ! she no sooner heard of the Vicar's brother being a lord, than court calendars and books of English peerage were eagerly explored by the lady, who assured her friends, that she had succeeded in tracing the Willoughby family, though in a remote degree, up to the Conqueror. Here, then, was the prediction verified ; Letitia was going to be allied to nobility, and distantly to royalty ; " ought not such a remarkable coincidence to appear in the public prints ? " " Certainly it ought," a friend replied, but he would advise her to defer it till the marriage took place ; to which she readily agreed, and was now all anxiety for the nuptials.

But here an unexpected turn was given to affairs ; for, contrary to the judgment and prognostics of all, Mr. Villers declared himself a lover, and professed his ardent attachment, not to Miss Fretwell,—but to Susan Thresher ! It would be difficult to describe the astonishment—the overwhelming surprise of Susan, at this declaration ! was she in a dream ? or did she really hear aright ? when he told her, that although he felt the highest respect for the Fretwell family, she, and she alone, had been the object of his visits ; he had long loved and admired her, and should have asked her hand before, had not his father's infirm state of health obliged him to defer it.

Susan heard him plead his passion for her with modesty and gratitude, and begged to be spared for the present.—Would she permit him to speak to her parents ? he resumed. Susan hesitated. One question more he would ask her ; had she



any prior engagement? "Oh! no, indeed," answered the artless girl!—At this critical moment, Miss Fretwell entered the apartment; and Susan, glad to escape, almost from herself, withdrew to her own room; where, overcome by a variety of contending emotions, she sat for some time, vainly endeavouring to recollect herself. Of all men living, she had thought Mr. Villers the wisest and best; she had revered his character as almost super-human; and to be selected by him—to be his wife—it was too mighty a good to be real, and yet he had said it. What a surprise to her dear parents!

She was beginning to indulge in the most pleasing emotions,—when suddenly Letitia's disappointment—the loss, too, that Mr. and Mrs. Fretwell would sustain, in being deprived of her services, filled her mind with vexation; she wished very much to go home, and consult with her father and mother, for by their advice she would be guided; but Mrs. Fretwell must first be inform-

ed. That lady had been waiting for her with the most fretful impatience : when Susan entered, she peevishly asked what had detained her so long ? Susan then told her what had passed between Mr. Villers and herself.

Now, though continual sufferings had worn down the spirits of Mrs. Fretwell, yet this avowal seemed to re-animate her passions : she called Susan, treacherous, cunning, and deceitful. Observing the object of her anger indignantly leaving the room, she changed her tone : “ And you are going to leave me ! how shall I suffer for all this ! what will become of me ? ” Then clasping her hands, she burst into a flood of tears. Susan Thresher, though touched with the situation of Mrs. Fretwell, was sufficiently aware that no sacrifice which she could make, would be effectual, as every year brought with it an additional weight of care and anxiety ; her parents too, became objects of solicitude, from whom she had been separated so long, and to them she would refer.

There are people in almost every neighbourhood, who seem to know your affairs better than you do yourself ; of this description were the acquaintance of the Fretwells ; for although on the part of Mr. Villers, there had never been any thing which could be construed into a partiality for Miss Fretwell, yet every one was sure it would be a match. Letitia thought so too ; for, though love could never find a place in her breast, she certainly preferred Mr. Villers to the rest of his sex. Persuaded also, by the daily accounts she heard, of the embellishments of the vicarage, that he would shortly make proposals in form, she became impatient, and irritated at the delay ; and it was in this humour she entered the apartment, at the moment he had been pleading his cause with Susan. Full of the subject, and elated with the prospect of success, Mr. Villers frankly avowed his passion for the farmer's daughter, to Miss Fretwell ; and was proceeding with all the

warmth and animation of a lover ; till suddenly checked by the storm he saw gathering in the lady's countenance, who, rising up, darted on him such a look of rage, as made him involuntarily draw back his chair. She spoke not, but suddenly quitting the room, left Mr. Villers in utter amazement. Letitia shut herself up in her apartment, where, giving way to her passions, she passed a dreadful night.

Confounded with the strange behaviour of the lady, Mr. Villers remained in the drawing-room a considerable time : and during that interval, reflecting on the past scene, the cause of Letitia's anger, and abrupt departure, flashed on his mind ; and being too good a man, to feel any pleasure in having made this undesigned conquest ; hoping also, that the secret was only between the lady and himself, for no one had ever hinted the subject to him ; he left the Hall, moralizing on the short-lived happiness of this world, and how often pain and vexation follow on the steps of pleasure.

So thought poor Susan, who, from feeling for a short space of time the purest delight, was thrown into a state of the greatest perplexity, by the behaviour of Mrs. Fretwell.

The parents of Susan were of the same opinion : elated by the visit of Mr. Villers, the object of which had been to ask their consent, and the prospect of their daughter's happiness, they felt eager to hear, from her own lips, the particulars of this happy event. But the appearance of Susan, for a time, put to flight the gay visions of the happy future : tenderly embracing her, they besought their daughter to tell them what distressed her. Released at once by Susan's explanation, they told her they had often debated the matter, whether they had done right or wrong, in letting her go to the Fretwells ; but in this, there was nothing doubtful, they knew at once how to act.

Susan's anxiety at leaving Mrs. Fretwell was also relieved by a note from Letitia, full of invective.

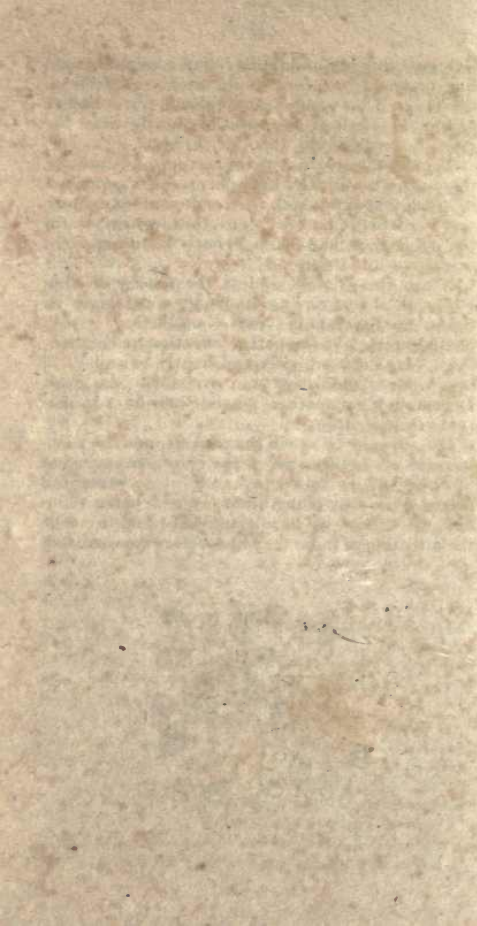
tive, accusing her of duplicity, and concluding that her presence in future would be disagreeable at the Hall. Thus compelled to take an abrupt leave of the Fretwell family, Susan shortly after became the wife of the Rev. Mr. Villers.

The good sense and sweet temper of Susan endeared her to all who knew her : she was spoken of as an example both as a wife and daughter ; and her worthy parents were thus rewarded for the pains they had taken, in early instilling right principles into her mind.

If any thing could add to the misery of Mrs. Fretwell, it was having had such a character as Susan in her family ; no ! not all her wealth could purchase such another affectionate companion. Mr. Fretwell daily and hourly bewailed his loss. More vindictive and irritable than ever, Letitia and her mother passed their days in mutual recriminations.

The advance of age in the parents, and the helplessness of Letitia, threw the chief management of their affairs into the hands of servants and mercenaries ; by which their estate became reduced, till there was hardly sufficient left to bribe the attention of those they had before commanded.







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